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ABSTRACT

College sports were started by students in the post Civil War period of the 1860's and 1870's. By the 1880's football, baseball, crew, and track and field were popular intercollegiate sports. The desire of the nation as a whole for diversion after World War I provided an impetus for sports in general and intercollegiate athletics in particular. During the 1920's intercollegiate athletics reached unprecedented popularity. New sports such as basketball, golf, tennis, soccer, lacrosse, swimming, gymnastics, and fencing were added to the program. Colleges were forced to provide new facilities, including large stadiums and new and bigger gymnasiums for popular indoor sports. This increased emphasis on college athletics led to some serious problems, such as commercialism, proselytizing and subsidization of athletes, and coaches who believed in winning at any cost. The formation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1906 resulted in colleges and universities assuming some control over their athletic programs. This in turn created a number of administrative problems. Fortunately, during this period physical education was undergoing some changes too, and its new emphasis on games and sports moved it closer to the athletic programs. By the end of the decade the merger was complete, and the physical education teacher and athletic coach were one and the same. (Author/RC)

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BOWLING GREEN

INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS IN THE ROARING TWENTIES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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"Nothing in the educational regime of our higher institutions perplexes the European visitor so much as the role that organized athletics play. On a crisp November afternoon he finds many thousands of men and women, gathered in a great amphitheater, wildly cheering a group of athletes who are described to him as playing a game of football, but who seem to the visitor to be engaged in a battle. He is the more mystified when he discovers that of the thousands of onlookers, not one in a hundred understands the game or can follow the strategy of the two teams."

When the visitor from the European university has pondered the matter, he comes to his American university colleagues with two questions:

"What relation has this astonishing athletic display to the work of an intellectual agency like a university?"

"How do students devoted to study, find either the time or the money to stage so costly a performance?"

The preceding paragraphs could easily be excerpts from a recent magazine article or newspaper account. Actually they are direct quotes from the report on "American College Athletics" made by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching almost fifty years ago.

In brief, the two questions asked by the Europeans can be answered in the following terms:

"In the United States the composite institution called a university is doubtless still an intellectual agency. But

SP009 464

it is also a social, a commercial, and an athletic agency, and these activities have in recent years appreciably overshadowed the intellectual life for which the university is assumed to exist."

"In the second place, the football contest that so astonishes the foreign visitor is not a student's game, as it once was. It is a highly organized commercial enterprise. The athletes who take part in it have come up through years of training; they are commanded by professional coaches; little if any personal initiative of ordinary play is left to the player. The great matches are highly profitable enterprises. Sometimes the profits go to finance college sports, sometimes to pay the cost of the sports amphitheater, in some cases the college authorities take a slice of the profits for college buildings."

Again, these statements, that could have been written today, are direct quotations from the Carnegie Report of 1929. It is rather discouraging to realize that so little progress has been made in intercollegiate athletics in the past fifty years. However, the purpose of this paper is to take a closer look at intercollegiate athletics in the "roaring twenties" and try to discover some of the reasons for their phenomenal growth.

Intercollegiate athletics, as we know them today, had their origins in the post Civil War period of the 1860's and 1870's. Although most history books cite the crew race between Yale and Harvard in 1852 as the first intercollegiate contest, it is quite apparent that it was essentially a

promotional activity for a summer resort on Lake Winnepesaukee. Other pre-Civil War contests were sporadic affairs, largely the outgrowth of what we would call intramural sports. Undoubtedly the influence of the English college system encouraged students in American colleges to participate in these informal contests or "house leagues" as they were called. Football in the fall and baseball in the spring were the most popular games. Rowing was also in favor with college students but was not as widespread as baseball and football.

During the 1870's the students in eastern colleges and universities organized teams in football, baseball, crew and track and field, and formed associations whose main purpose was to promote intercollegiate athletics in those sports. The year 1880 may be set as the dividing line between the old regime and the new, with increased emphasis on the development and expansion of intercollegiate athletics. By the turn of the century intercollegiate athletics were in vogue from coast to coast. Natural rivalries among institutions developed into athletic conferences to promote more competition among comparable colleges and universities.

The management and direction of college sports had originated with the students. However, as the program developed and more sports were added, it became necessary to employ graduate managers, coaches and trainers to provide continuity and leadership for this expanding enterprise. The ensuing years were rather chaotic ones for intercollegiate athletics. Periodic opposition of the faculty and administration impeded their progress to some extent and created an

adversary relationship between the students and faculty. Finally in 1905 a concerted effort to unify reputable colleges and universities resulted in the formation of the Inter-collegiate Athletic Association, which in 1910 became the National Collegiate Athletic Association. This led to greater faculty control of the program and eventually to acceptance of athletics as a proper function of the institution.

At about this same time a number of significant developments were taking place in society that would revolutionize physical education and athletics. According to Betts, "The rising standard of living, the growth of the city, and the extension of leisure time were paramount among the social forces which promoted the athletic impulse." Education was responding to these changes by implementing a program of social education in accordance with the theories of John Dewey. The new education signalled a decline of the old ~~style~~ physical training with its emphasis on formal gymnastics. The new physical education of Thomas Wood, which emphasized games and sports, was more in accord with the new trends in education. For the first time athletics could claim to be a legitimate part of the educational enterprise. This acceptance combined with the societal factors was enough to insure the status of athletics in colleges, universities and high schools.

Betts goes on to say that "...some great detonating force may be imperative to the development of a movement which otherwise might lay dormant." The specific detonation for American sports in general was provided by participation of the United States in World War I. Young men from all parts

of the country took part in rigorous physical training programs and then were introduced to a wide array of sports. As anyone who has been in the service knows, the principal problem with military life is simply boredom. Both the Army and Navy recognized the need for extensive recreational programs. These often resulted in highly competitive activities as well. When the struggle was ended millions of war-weary men came home eager for more participation in recreational sports and competitive athletics. There is little doubt that World War I did more for sports than any other event in our history and paved the way for the boom period of the roaring twenties. Betts theorized that, "The gap of the war era may partially explain the uncontrolled and misdirected course of sporting enthusiasm in the 1920's."

On June 28, 1919, the New York Times editorialized on "The Revival of Sport" in which it stated that, "The nation released from years of gloom and suppression is expressing the reaction by plunging into sport." At the annual meeting of the NCAA that same year, Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, paid this tribute to athletics: "Our soldiers played ball from Paris to the Rhine. We carried over there with us American recreational ideals and standards. Men in the ranks learned to play games they had never indulged in at home. It was the wholesome and attractive substitutes that kept the young men away from the immoral side of life during their service in the army." The stage was now set for the tremendous boom in intercollegiate athletics.

Largely as a result of the war, participation in a wide

o

variety of sports, was introduced at the college level. Among the newer sports were boxing and wrestling (popularized in military service), lacrosse, soccer, hockey, gymnastics, swimming and fencing. Football, however, not only maintained its position as king of the college sports, but increased in popularity, particularly with the general public. It was during the 1920's that many of the universities built their huge stadiums to accommodate not only the student body but alumni and townspeople as well. In Columbus, Ohio, where football is a fanatical religion, the people of that city contributed about half the money needed for the construction of the Ohio State stadium that seated over 60,000 spectators.

The football heroes of the 20's were legendary--starting with Red Grange, the Galloping Ghost from Illinois, the Four Horsemen, the Seven Mules, and George Gipp of Notre Dame, Ernie Nevers of Stanford, Chris Cagle of the Army, Benny Friedman and Benny Oosterbaan of Michigan, Bronko Nagurski of Minnesota, Ken Strong of New York University, Wes Fesler of Ohio State and many others too numerous to mention.

Football coaches, too, were national figures and the originators of the intricacies of the modern game of football. They included Knute Rockne, Amos Alonzo Stagg, Glenn S. (Pop) Warner, Andy Kerr, Gil Dobie, Bob Zuppke, Fielding (Hurry Up) Yost, Jock Sutherland and Bill Roper. In contrast to football, I doubt that many of us could name a single college athlete or coach in any other sport in the 1920's.

However, basketball was beginning to make its presence felt at the collegiate level during this period. Prior to

World War I, basketball ^{HAD} been confined largely to YMCA's and high schools. One reason for the emergence of basketball in the 1920's was the construction of many new college gymnasiums with basketball in mind. Most of the older gymnasiums were small in size with low ceilings, little seating capacity and designed primarily for gymnastics.

The only college sport that suffered during this period was baseball. The reasons for this are somewhat mysterious because professional baseball was at the height of its popularity, primarily because of the heroic exploits of Babe Ruth. Delegates to the National Baseball Federation convention in 1926 admitted that the game was dying all across the country and it was estimated that participation was off as much as fifty percent. Another detracting factor for college baseball was the increased popularity of other sports and the emerging importance of spring football.

The upsurge in athletics created a number of administrative problems for the colleges and universities that were now making a genuine effort to controll intercollegiate athletics in a wholesome manner.

The first and undoubtedly most serious problem was finances. The main sources of income were of course gate receipts and student fees. Since student fees were very limited, most of the money had to come from paid admissions. Naturally football provided by far the largest portion. This led to the age-old vicious cycle: in order to take in more money you must have winning teams, which in turn means better players, which requires more extensive recruiting

and subsidizing, etc. In addition, it required the services of an expert coach who ultimately became another administrative headache. All of this inevitably led to the commercialization of college athletics and all the evils that pertain thereto.

The next administrative problem was the need to provide adequate facilities for sports, including gymnasiums, outdoor playing fields, swimming pools, and field houses. Most of the colleges had antiquated facilities in all sports and were required to expend large sums of money to bring them up to the standards required by the new emphasis on athletics.

An unlooked for problem that arose was that of eligibility. For many years there simply were no eligibility rules. It was not uncommon for a star athlete to participate for six or seven years at one institution, or to transfer to a different school each year, or to be a coach and a player at the same time. The NCAA attacked the problem of eligibility conscientiously, but in the final analysis eligibility was determined by the integrity of the institution. Obviously, the delegation of responsibility, the keeping of records, and maintaining the quality of the academic work posed quite a problem for each institution.

The next problem was concerned with the making of schedules. Here again the profit-making motive was an essential factor. This affected scheduling in several different ways. It was a common practice for the larger universities to open the football season with easy opponents, usually smaller colleges. The small college received a good sized guarantee for taking its beating and often supported itself for the

9

entire season on that one game. The next step was the intersectional game which had two goals in mind; one was to make money and the other to please influential alumni in various parts of the country. Other sports encountered scheduling difficulties, too, particularly playing games on school days and the increasing number of contests in each sport.

The final problem and one of the most persistent ones, dealt with faculty control of athletics. Many authorities have maintained that the panacea for all the ills of college athletics is true faculty control. Be that as it may, most colleges and universities leaned toward their alumni and/or their athletic directors to solve this problem. The Carnegie Report made an interesting point. It recommended that the management of athletics be turned over primarily to the undergraduates. It pointed out that, "The bearing of responsibilities presents one of the most important means by which youth may be matured into manhood and certain qualities that are desirable in any citizen may be developed and strengthened...." "Much of the genuine educational benefit that responsibility in the administrative control of athletics might bring is reaped today by men whose formal education has ended."

Probably the most controversial issue in college athletics was the position of the coach. Over the years no single person connected with sports had undergone so many changes in function and status as the coach. Of course the first coaches were undergraduate players, often the captain and coach being the

10

same person. Later coaches were graduate students, sometimes professional athletes, and almost always part-time employees. In 1910 the NCAA passed a resolution recommending that coaches be hired on a full-time basis as regular members of the teaching staff. By the 1920's perhaps half of the coaches were full-time employees with faculty status.

In one study of one hundred and four head football coaches, eighty-eight of them had college degrees and sixty three of them were full-time coaches with faculty status. On the other hand, most college baseball coaches were former professional players who were hired on a seasonal basis. They were largely responsible for the college baseball player getting involved in playing for money in the summer time. In track and field it was not unusual for a competent trainer to advance to the position of coach.

Since very few colleges had teacher education programs in physical education, not many of the coaches of this era were professional physical educators, and there still remained a few college physicians who were coaches. More often than not the coach of tennis, golf, swimming, lacrosse, soccer, fencing, or gymnastics was a faculty member in an academic area who had a particular interest in that sport.

While it is impossible to compare coaches salaries then with salaries today, it may be interesting to note some comparisons of coaches salaries to college deans and full professors in the 1920's. In a study of one hundred colleges and universities, the highest salary paid to a dean was \$15,000, the average \$6400; the highest salary for a full

professor was \$12,000, the average \$5150; the highest paid head football coach drew a salary of \$14,000, and the average was \$6160. As you can see, a football coach rated below a dean but above a full professor. Coaches of other sports did not fare as well as the football coach. At large universities the average salary for all other coaches was \$5500 and at smaller colleges the figure was \$2800, still not bad salaries for those days.

The Carnegie Report quotes an Oxford don, who possessed remarkable insight, "The paid coach is at the bottom of all difficulties in American college athletics." Of course, most coaches of athletic teams in England are volunteers and not paid for those services.

It is rather difficult to make any generalizations about intercollegiate athletics in the 1920's. In many respects they were a reflection of the times--a post war boom period. On the other hand, it is also evident that college athletics in the 1920's were the end product of an evolutionary process that had started in the post Civil War period.

Perhaps the basic question should be: What did athletics contribute to college life? In general, American theory respecting the purposes of education falls into two categories. First, there are those who believe that the college and university are essentially intellectual institutions that should train the habits and powers of the mind. On the other hand, there are those who regard the college and university as socializing agencies that prepare students for various aspects of life.

In either case, there was a place for athletics in college life. If training the mind was the primary function of education, then athletics contribute indirectly by providing recreation and contrast and may lead to the development of desirable moral qualities. However, if education was essentially a socializing force, then athletics make a direct contribution through their physical aspects as well as their moral and ethical considerations.

The Carnegie Report came to a positive but rather naive conclusion. It stated, "Whichever conception of the function of the American college, intellectual or socializing agency, be adopted, let only the chosen ideal be followed with sincerity and clear vision, and in the course of years our college sport will largely take care of itself." With a perspective of nearly fifty years, it is quite evident that college sport has not taken care of itself. Perhaps the chosen ideal was not followed with sincerity or perhaps we never had a clear vision of the place of college athletics. What is discouraging is the fact that the Carnegie Report could apply to college athletics today equally as well as it did in 1929. The problems of college athletics in the 1920's are still with us today only on a much larger scale.

Apparently we have fallen heir to the dilemma of intercollegiate athletics, and the solutions, if there are any, are in our hands. ~~At the present time there is no reason to think that~~ ^{we are not naive enough to think that} we can do a better job with intercollegiate athletics in the next fifty years ^{HAVE DONE} than we ~~did~~ in the past.